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# THE LAST PASSION PLAY

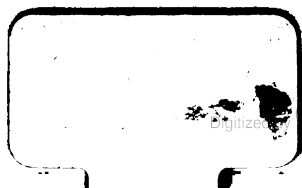
BY

MARY CATHERINE SMELTZLEY



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## THE LAST PASSION PLAY



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# THE LAST PASSION PLAY

BY

Mary Catherine Smeltzley

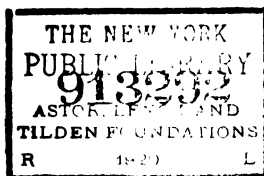


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## Foreword

The following ideas are partly the result of a visit to Oberammergau in 1910 and partly the result of reading Mrs. Louise Parks-Richards' "Oberammergau: Its Passion Play and Players", Monsignore Joseph Schroeder's "Oberammergau and Its Passion Play", and Frau Hermine Diemer's "Oberammergau and Its Passion Play." Often I have quoted from these authors because their quaint mediaeval style so beautifully portrayed the spirit of the people among whom they had so long lived. Since I was eager to interpret the spirit of the people I am glad to acknowledge my indebtedness to them.

Since the great Passion Play at Oberammergau is the only modern survival of the mediaeval religious drama, it is my intention to call to the minds of lovers of the play its decennial in 1920.

*Mary Catherine Smeltzley*



## The Last Passion Play

At last we are ready for the journey to Oberammergau, the center of interest on the Continent during the summer of 1910. Leaving Munich at nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, the second of August, we find at the railway station a great crowd of people of all ranks and countries, principally Americans. Our attention is particularly attracted by the peculiar ear-rings, head-dresses, and aprons which many of the peasants wear.

Soon after leaving Munich, the train winds amongst the hills, through green valleys and along the borders of Lake Starnberg. After passing through a pine wood, we wind gradually up the mountain side. Here and there we pass a wayside shrine or statue of the Virgin, interesting to us by reason of the legend that such images are invisible to the unregenerate, as heavy as lead to the impenitent sinner, but as light as a feather to every one who has a contrite heart. After passing Weilheim we traverse pasture lands, corn fields, and orchards. From Murnau, the little village terminal of the new electric road, the way lies through an open country, studded with scattered

hamlets. Presently we see the Bavarian Alps towering one above the other in dark cloud-like masses.

After skirting the heights of Saulgrub, we have before us a picture of surprising loveliness—the long, narrow valley of the Ammer, closed in on all sides by mountains; below us the village of Allenau, farther on in the center of the valley Unterammergau, and in the distance Oberammergau, our destination. To the right and left are mountains of moderate altitude: Bürschling, Zahn and Kofel on the one side; Hörnle and Aufacker on the other. In front, in the center, rises the Laber, the mountains of Oberau forming the background. As we climb up to this narrow plateau, where the village lies almost surrounded by its mountain walls, a strange and solemn sight confronts us—upon the summit of the Kofel, one of the highest peaks, outlined against the sky and flashing in the sunlight, stands a cross, the emblem of the Passion.

At about one o'clock we arrive at the station of Oberammergau. Here we are still further impressed with the strangeness of the environment, for standing in groups about the station waiting to conduct guests to their respective homes we find the dienstmen of Oberammergau; men whose long flowing hair, falling over their shoulders, suggests pictures seen in churches and in old Bible illustrations; men whose pictur-

esque costumes make one recall the Galilean fishermen of old; men whose friendly and obliging manners portray the true High German wherever he is found.

Then the narrow, winding streets and the tastefully painted houses attract our attention as we betake ourselves to the home of Herr Joseph Wolf, where we are to be domiciled while in the village; for Oberammergau is a village without plan or point of compass. And excepting the one long street that intersects the town with a single oblique turn, there is no street running in any direction even for a short distance only without bending or sharply turning to end against the corner of a house or the side of a cow stable. During our stay we have ample opportunity to realize that the location of Herr Wolf's house is no exception to the rule, for from the barn directly in front of us come strange and discordant noises.

After we are comfortably settled in a large two-story house under the same roof with three Jersey cows, we take a survey of the village. We learn that Oberammergau is 2523 feet above the sea level, that it contains about 400 families with a population of about 1600 people, most of whom are Catholics. We find that the people, a mixture of two pure Teutonic races—Bavarians and Suabians—are more like Swiss than Germans. We learn that isolation begot their independence and that the little community,

secure amidst its rocky ramparts against the intermeddling autocracy of distant governments, evolved the simplest and the soundest system of democracy. The administrative head of the community is the bürgermeister, elected by the householders of the village, nearly every one of whom is a landholder—the poorest with three acres and the richest having about sixty. We realize that it has been a mistake for us to think that these people are mere peasants and that they do not go beyond the narrow views of country folk in general, for many of them are educated and refined with manners quite on a par with those of the cosmopolitan. Many of the younger men and women speak English as well as we.

We find that the most conspicuous public buildings are the parish church, the new Passion Play theater, the new school of carving, the hospital, the theatre for rehearsals, a school, and the town hall. The houses with their clean white walls and green window-shutters are irregularly grouped around the church, which, with its mosque-like minaret, forms the living center of the place. It is a spacious and appropriate House of God, handsomely decorated with fine stained-glass windows, and containing a beautiful communion rail and a chime of seven bells. The ceiling is adorned with an interesting fresco by Gindter. One scene in particular, that over the organ, represents the taber-

nacle of St. Peter's in Rome and has, on account of its clever perspective, a strikingly natural effect.

Near the church is the cemetery, where formerly the plays were presented, and where every Sunday, after the morning service, the relatives come to the graves to sprinkle them with holy water and to say their prayers. There are many monuments here. One of the most beautiful was erected by the community to those of its sons who fell in 1870-1871. There is also one erected by the pupils and friends to the teacher Dedler, composer of the "Passion" music; and the finest in the cemetery is in memory of Daisenberger, who reconstructed and revised the text of the Play.

The major portion of the village lies north of the church. We still see a few finely painted houses, but unfortunately the best here have been destroyed by fire. Formerly every house in the village was decorated with admirable frescoes, the work of the gifted Franz Zwink, great-grandfather of Johannes Zwink, the Judas of 1910. He is said once to have promised a peasant woman, who happened to be churning butter at the time, that if she would give him the butter she was churning he would paint a Virgin Mary on her house by the time she had finished making it; and so it was. When the butter was ready, the Virgin Mary had been painted. He has been called the Paul



Veronese of Oberammergau, and perhaps the art of this country was a stray element of the art of the Renaissance which had drifted into this lonely mountain village. One of the finest of the preserved houses is that of Dr. Lang, which on the garden side shows "Christ before Pilate" and is probably unequalled in the boldness of its architecture and perspective. It is to be regretted that the new houses have lost the characteristics which have always been peculiar to Bavarian architecture and which contributed to the idyllic aspect of the country.

The sanitary condition of the village has been greatly improved within recent years. The hospital built in 1890 has since been excellently furnished. In 1891 the village was drained according to the plans of larger towns. In 1897 an immense reservoir was constructed, and in 1905 all the streets were lighted by electricity. Since then the village authorities have bought houses and torn them down to make room for larger buildings. Streets have been widened, and no exertions have been spared to add to the charm and beauty of the village.

The grandest modern building is the new carving school. In 1800 was founded the first drawing school of Oberammergau. This was the beginning of the wood-carving school of today, which since 1874 has been under the direction of Ludwig Lang. Mr. Lang, who was for many years a student in

the art schools of Munich, is assisted by Anton Lechner and Xavier Müller, both of whom have also had training in the Munich schools. While formerly most of the wood-carvers were entirely ignorant of drawing, each man carving only a certain figure or set of figures year after year, today every child has the advantage of a course in the drawing school under competent instruction. In 1888 the first building for the drawing and wood-carving school was erected, but this soon proved inadequate and in 1909, at a cost of one hundred and seven thousand marks, the present commodious building was erected. The art of wood-carving has always had a very great influence on the lives of the inhabitants. In former years many of the natives brought their carvings out into the world themselves, and had their own traders not only on the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic, but also in Sweden and St. Petersburg, where Daser of Oberammergau possessed the monopoly of importing these carvings. At the present time the trade is mostly in the hands of "dealers" who act as intermediaries between the carver and the public. There are at the present time sixteen pupils in the carving department and one hundred and ten in the drawing department. Thus the parish does its utmost to restore the prosperity of former times, but its ancient prestige in the carving of crucifixes will scarcely be reached

again. Foreign competition, high import duties, and meagre wages act as a check upon the industry. If it were not for the fact that nearly every wood-carver possesses a small cottage with a little plot of land, it would not be possible for some of them to meet the requirements of life, since in wood-carving everything is "piece work"; and only a few earn fifty pfennig or about twelve cents an hour.

After this brief account of the village, we may now take a view of the surrounding country. The situation of Ammergau is pleasing rather than impressive. The Kofel with its steep and dangerous looking slopes strikes us as being a most remarkable mountain. It was already known to the Romans who named the settlement "Statio Cofeliacas." During the Middle Ages the betrothals of bridal couples were celebrated on its summit with music and dancing. On May 30, 1580, a colossal wooden figure of a knight which the merchant Pabst of Nürnberg had made was set up on the spot already well known because of these celebrations. Later this was replaced by a large cross—the cross which so impressed us as we caught our first glimpse of the village.

The village can boast of only one public monument, but certainly a splendid one, the group of the Crucifixion. On September 25, 1871, King Louis II of Bavaria was present at the performance of the Passion

Play. He was highly pleased and promised the gift of a religious work of art, as an evidence of his approbation. In four years the sculptor Halbig of Munich completed this group of the Crucifixion. To convey an idea of its size, I may say that the monument weighs 220,000 pounds, each of the three figures measures 13 feet in height, and the whole structure is 38 feet high. In acknowledgment of the pleasure which the king had derived from the performance of the Play and for the purpose of encouraging the natives to remain true to their traditions, he had engraved on the reverse side of the monument these words:

“To the art loving Oberammergauers,  
faithful to the customs of their  
fathers, from King Ludwig II  
in remembrance of the  
Passion Play.”

On the anniversary of the tragic death of the King, mass is celebrated here.

In close proximity to Oberammergau stands the well-known castle of Linderhof. Even nearer lies the celebrated monastery of Ettal. During the Austrian invasion of 1703 and 1704 the inhabitants made a vow that they would perform a yearly pilgrimage to Ettal, which vow they have religiously kept to the present day.

As far back as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries religious plays were performed in several parts of Germany, especially in Bavaria and in the Tyrol, which were mostly dramatised by the clergy or monks or were at least superintended by them. In this epoch of meagre education, when most of the clergy and a few of the laity were acquainted with reading and writing, the theater was the most suitable means of disseminating knowledge. The material for these plays, which were usually written by some one of the monks, was taken either from the Bible or from some part of the local history of the people. Later in the sixteenth century a scenic feature was introduced—the festival play. The first of these plays represented the tragedy of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor. It lasted two days, the stage was the entire city of Munich wonderfully decorated, while over a thousand people participated in the presentation. People came from far and near to watch the approach of the one who impersonated the victorious Emperor, not on a narrow stage, but through the gates of the city, seated in a real chariot drawn by four horses, and surrounded by four hundred knights in glistening armour. Two years later the play of Esther was produced by two thousand actors. "Of such proportions were the great open air dramas of the Bavarian capital more than three hundred

years ago, when the folk drama became merged into the festival play, which in turn was incorporated into Wagnerian productions. But of all the material which Biblical history affords, none presents such possibilities for dramatic rendition as the story of the Passion of our Lord. These plays owe their origin in part at least to the beliefs of an age when there was an unwavering faith in Divine intervention. For these peasants there were no mysteries, no impossibilities. Every natural phenomenon, every roll of thunder, every flash of lightning, was to them an expression of Divine significance. They literally saw God in everything, and the connection between the material and the spiritual world was too close to be broken, even by the extraordinary."

The village of Oberammergau being a much frequented village where many travellers stopped, since it enjoyed the privileges of the free cities of Germany and also the advantage of being on the highway from Italy to Augsburg, was particularly adapted to such representations. Also the proximity of Rothenbuch and Ettal contributed much to the development of these plays. The Bavarians, a highly sensitive people of artistic bent and great simplicity, with features of delicate mould and with imaginative powers quickened by the mercantile processions and caravans of foreigners, began to look upon theatrical performances as a kind of relig-

ious custom. This was especially true at the beginning of the seventeenth century when war had devastated the German countries and had depopulated and impoverished the land of the Ammer. When later in 1634 the plague broke out in Oberammergau the community in order to ward off the calamity made a vow to perform at regular periods the Passion of the Saviour, as a work acceptable to God.

The story of the dread visitation of the plague of near three hundred years ago is quaintly told in an old chronicle which was preserved in the village town hall. According to this document, one of the remote consequences of the Thirty Years' War of Gustavus Adolphus was a pestilence which broke out in the villages surrounding Oberammergau. Whole families were swept away. In one village only four people were left alive. It was a visitation somewhat similar to the plague at Athens in the days of Pericles and to the Black Death in England in the time of Edward III. While village after village fell a prey to its ravages, the people of Oberammergau alone remained untouched, and enforced a vigorous quarantine against the outside world. These preventive measures were for a while successful. But then, as always, the blind instinctive promptings of the human heart broke through the regulations and Caspar Schuchler (Schüsler), a good man, who had

been working in the plague-stricken village of Eschenlohe, felt an uncontrollable desire to return to his wife and children, in Oberammergau. Whether it was that he felt the finger of death upon him and that he wished to see his loved ones, or whether he merely wished as housefather to see that they had bread to eat and a roof to cover them, history does not record. All it says is that Caspar Schuchler evaded the quarantine and returned to his wife and little ones. A terrible retribution followed. In two days he was a corpse—a victim of the plague which he had brought with him from over the mountains. The plague spread with such fatal haste that in thirty-three days eighty-four of the villagers had perished. Then the people in their despair assembled to discuss their plight, for where the plague struck there death followed. The village council as was their wont in great extremity called upon God to turn away their affliction. "They knew nothing of the measures of sanitary boards, nor of the precautions of health commissioners, and if they had they would in all probability have preferred the more direct method of resorting to Divine intervention." In their appeal to God they made a promise that should He spare them, they would perform every ten years, as a memorial, the tragedy of the Passion of His Son. From that hour the plague was stayed. Those who were already smitten of the plague recov-



ered, nor did any others fall victims to the pestilence. Since Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, there had not been so signal a deliverance from mortal illness. Thus it was that the Passion Play became a fixed institution in Oberammergau. The performance of the Play, like the angel with drawn sword which stands on the summit of the castle of Saint Angelo in Rome, is the pious recognition of a miraculous interposition. But for poor Caspar Schuchler it would have gone the way of all other Passion Plays. He sinned, no doubt, and he suffered. But out of his sin and out of the sorrow of the people has come the Play as we have it to-day, the one solitary survival of what was at one time a great vehicle of religious teaching. Hence lovers of the Play may well feel grateful to Caspar Schuchler.

The representations took place every ten years until the year 1674. Then in the year 1680 it was decided the Play should be performed in the year ending in ten or its multiplicatives and this was done up to 1770, when no representations were given in accordance with an edict by the Elector Max Josef III prohibiting all future religious performances. Finally after many petitions, together with forcible arguments and a new text, permission was again granted them by the Elector Karl Theodor in 1780 to perform the Passion Play publicly without any hindrance every ten years. After Plays in 1790,

1800, 1810 another edict interrupted religious representations and it was only with the greatest difficulties that an exception was granted in the case of Oberammergau.

If the Passion Play now draws together an audience composed of all nationalities, it is due principally to the beauty of the text, which is founded upon the Bible and the Christian religion. It is simple and this simplicity it is which causes the true nobleness of the acted drama to stand out in still more significant force. The oldest text now in existence dates back to the year 1662, which is probably composed of two still older ones. In this text are many passages of extreme beauty and deep feeling, although not unalloyed perhaps with ingredients which bear witness of the less-refined good taste of those times. "Allegorical figures, with most grotesque features, were often introduced which added more to the hilarity of the on-lookers than to their edification. Satan himself was often characterized as a donkey, with long ears and a tail, and when this caricature was represented in a quarrel with the angels over the soul of Judas, in the vestibule of purgatory, comedy took the place of religious drama." It was then the clerical authorities forbade these representations in the church yard and they were transferred to the grassy plot outside.

After several revisions by others, the text in its present form originated from the pen

of Pater Ottmar Weiss in 1815. The present text of the songs is, with few exceptions, almost word for word the original of Weiss, while the actual text of the play was transformed and improved by his pupil, the Geistlicher Rat Joseph Alois Daisenberger. If anyone has put finishing touches to beautify and improve the text, it is indeed Daisenberger, to whom all honor is due. When in 1845 he became priest in Oberammergau he devoted his whole energy and talents to the development of his ideal. As priest and teacher he sought by word and example to promote true Christian feeling among his parishioners. As director of the Passion performances he endeavored to impregnate the actors with the spirit of their sublime roles and with that of the Divine Saviour.

The criticism of the text by many is severe. In the first place fault may be found with the insufficient construction of the drama, then with the development and execution of the various scenes, again with the weakness of the language in the play, and lastly with the plot of the drama. The plot is based on the expulsion of the buyers and sellers from the sacred precincts of the temple at Jerusalem. There is much criticism now that an undignified part is allotted to the Saviour, so that the extreme importance of the act of the Saviour in doing away with the Old Testament sacrificial altar is put entirely in the background and loses, there-

fore, much of its significance. As far as the reproach concerns the usurers in the temple, it is just. The spectator, who attends the play as a learned critic, regrets the weak points of the drama, for indeed it is no actual drama because the skilful and well-conceived development of the plot is missing. It is rather an expression of religion. "Those who witness the play from religious motives will not judge too critically. It is enough for them that the foundation and development of the drama lies in the hate of the buyers and sellers, who are harmed in their business by the scribes and unjustly treated by the Pharisees, being at the last cleverly incited by both parties to be the leaders of a blinded crowd for the persecution and death of the hated Man of Galilee. The whole picture represents these buyers and sellers as the nearest propelling force, and their inconsiderate hatred becomes the prime motor of the whole Passion of the Lord," which of course is not in accordance with the Bible. If, however, the text were modernized it would require first-class actors which the natives do not pretend to be. In February of 1908 the thought arose in the Passion Play committee of shortening or altering some slow and monotonous scenes, but a few days later the idea was given up.

If it is not advisable to give up the old text, it is not necessary to include in it the poetical part of the drama, for the "poetry"

or rather the text which is sung does not approach the most modest pretensions. The verses do not at all compare with "the technical height and form of the part in prose, even if the latter contains many obsolete and unusual expressions and pictures. Apart from their frequently unbearable length, which, however, is accounted for by the shifting of scenery behind the stage curtain, they do not confine themselves to the introduction of the several types by explanatory words, but they anticipate the future actions of the play," often in an awkward manner. Then, too, "the constant repetition of the stanzas is unutterably tedious, as they lead the thoughts onward very slowly. In these songs the attitude, costume, gesture, speech and dramatical talent of the actor must compensate for all; the verses take a secondary place and are entirely lost in the whole effect."

The tableaux are delightful; they are artistically placed on the stage not only as regards single figures, but also in the presentation of great crowds, and excite the admiration of all spectators because of their skillful arrangement and harmonious blending of color. These living pictures, twenty-six in number, which precede each successive action of the play and set an Old Testament type before its New Testament fulfillment, which illustrate stories of old Jewish history and foreshadow the particular inci-

dents in the Life and Passion of our Lord that are unrolled as the play progresses, are like the splendid paintings in the great galleries and almost as motionless. They assist in making the play a succession of beautiful pictures and they aid much in the artistic enjoyment of the spectators.

The music of the Passion Play is another part of the production about which there exists great diversity of opinion; it meets with many fault-finders, even decided opponents. In any case even the opponents must concede that it abounds in rare beauties, containing a great number of truly sublime parts. The music which is here represented is music adapted to the olden times; in every case it must first of all be simple. It originated with a native of Oberammergau, the Lehrer, Rochus Dedler, for the play of 1820. After various attempts to improve it, which only spoilt it, it was decided to leave it in almost its original state. However, the Lehrer, Ferdinand Feldigl, newly arranged it for 1900 and formed of it a masterpiece. The orchestra situated in a recess in front of the proscenium is composed of forty-two musicians conducted by Louis Wittman, while the chorus consists of forty singers directed by Ferdinand Rutz. Some critics say the music has been pitched too high on the whole and therefore gradually jars on the ears. It also requires considerable technical powers for its satisfactory rendition. Taking this

into consideration and remembering that few of the performers, excepting the director of the orchestra, have studied music outside of the village, and not forgetting that the whole play lasts eight hours, it would hardly be fair to refuse one's approval of the singers' and musicians' efforts. Besides the play takes place in the open air, where acoustics are poor and vocal powers less effective. Dedler's music is the suitable companion of the rural play and faithfully serves its purpose.

At the extreme north-western end of the village stands the Passion Theatre. In accordance with the nature of the representation and its divine purpose, this theater is entirely different from all other buildings bearing the name. It is from the very foundation the work of a native of Oberammergau, the Beneficiat Unhoch, who lived at the same time with Weiss and Dedler. In January 1899 a magnificent new building for the audience was erected. The framework of the new hall consists of six gigantic iron arches one behind the other, each one of which weighs forty thousand pounds. There are about four thousand numbered seats with standing room for three hundred people. The whole of the auditorium is covered, the sides can be opened or closed according to the requirements of the weather; twelve large gates allow of the theater being emptied in three minutes.

The stage with a width of about one hundred and twenty-six feet and a depth of seventy-five feet is in reality not only the stage of Sophocles but also of Shakespeare. The first glimpse of it gives a grand and at the same time pleasing impression. The curtain in front of the temple-like structure in the center of the stage is ornamented with the statuesque figures of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Moses of Michael Angelo. Upon this drop curtain there appears the first reminder of the artistic trend of the Oberammergau, in that nothing less than the reproduction of these masterpieces greets the spectators of his Passion Play. When this principal curtain has been drawn, there appears a second one with rather gaudy Byzantine designs, which can be drawn back from both sides. "The front of the proscenium is supported by four Corinthian columns and represents in the center of the pediment Christ in the midst of His people. Adjoining this central structure there are two gates on either side, affording a glimpse into the well-painted streets of Jerusalem. Both gates are flanked by palatial buildings, the steps of which lead to the doors of Annas' and Pilate's houses on the right and left respectively. Cloisters with a background of red wall form the connection with the large auditorium, so that the various parts of the scenery blend together into one connected whole." It is on the proscenium



where the chorus in a semi-circle delivers its performances and where the great mass scenes take place; the Entry of Christ, the Death Sentence by Pilate, the Carrying of the Cross. It is on the central stage where the interior scenes take place; as the Last Supper, the Washing of the Disciples' Feet, the Meetings of the High Council, and where also the tableaux are set.

Mechanical contrivances are entirely dispensed with. In the northern part of the theater are roomy apartments in which twenty-two dressing rooms, rooms for the accessories, and a small refreshment room for the actors are to be found. Here "there is a whole network of ropes, numerous beams, movable scenery, boards, benches, pulleys and weights; there are lances of Roman soldiers; staves of generals, apostles and prophets; crowns, helmets and chaplets; goblets, jugs and dishes for banquets; jewelry of various kinds; and the costumes perfectly arranged in numerous wardrobes for nearly a thousand people." Most surprising of all there is not the slightest disorder or confusion, as everyone knows his place perfectly. To increase the general effect, the greatest pains are taken to represent real pictures, to make the decorations as brilliant as possible. "Every sham is avoided, even the hair and beards must be real; no cheap tinsel stuffs are used. Only those really good materials are employed, which cling lightly to the

body, fall in graceful folds, and can stand sunlight as well as rain." About twenty thousand marks are given every ten years for the purpose of purchasing material for costumes. The principal characters wear rich woollen stuffs, silks, and real gold trimmings. "The Jews and the Roman soldiers appear in those costumes, which the tradition of the Middle Ages has handed down to us, while warriors in shining armour, executioners, and menials can satisfy the most exacting taste. All costumes are designed in the village itself and made by native hands."

The members of the choir or "guardian angels," as they are called in the village, are particularly worthy of mention. They appear, both men and women, in long white flowing garments, with a golden girdle, a long coloured mantle falling from the shoulders and a glittering diadem. The different sexes can sometimes be distinguished only by the long loose hair of the women. The "Prologuist" as the chief of them all is particularly well dressed in a costume bought in Damascus and carries a magnificent wand. Twice these brilliant robes are exchanged for black—immediately before and after the Crucifixion. The bright robes are resumed at the close.

According to the custom of by-gone centuries the community assembled at the Town Hall on July 7, 1907, to take the usual vote as to whether the Passion Play should

be performed in 1910. On October 27, 1907, the citizens again assembled at the Town Hall "to nominate the candidates for the six new members to be added to the fourteen members of the Town Council, which, together with the parish priest as honorary member, was to constitute the Passion Play Committee with the Bürgermeister as chairman. Five days later the election of these six men out of the twenty candidates by a plurality of names on the papers handed in to the Bürgermeister was announced." This committee assumes all responsibility, its decisions are final. Its first election was that of Ludwig Lang for the post of Director of the Play. In March of 1909 the female voices of the chorus were selected. No married women are allowed to participate. After all committees on the press, music, photographs, buildings, lodgings, tickets, et cetera, had been elected, came the question of supreme interest, the election of the performers. On the 27th of September, 1909, began the nominations for the principal roles, those for the sixty-five speaking roles were continued on September 29 and 30, and on October 8 and 11.

Ludwig Lang commenced the work of the committee by taking up each role in question, and explaining to his co-workers the necessary qualifications requisite to each impersonation. Then beginning with the most important roles, the members of the com-

mittee proposed in writing a candidate's name, which on a folded paper was placed in an urn. After each name was thoroughly discussed there was taken a secret ballot. The name or names resulting from this ballot now became the nominations. In this way all the candidates were separately considered and voted upon. Two weeks later the committee again came together on October 12, 1909. At eight o'clock in the morning it assembled in the Town Hall, and in a body repaired to the church to attend a service with high mass, returning immediately after to the council chamber for a final vote. Again the fitness of each individual for the proposed role was considered. Ballots were once more cast, each member dropping a white or black ball in the urn as the names were offered, and the resulting vote was irrevocable.

Two weeks had been spent by the committee in secret deliberation and by the villagers in feverish suspense, since to them it means much more who is to be the next Christus or the next Pilate than it does to the ordinary American citizen who is to be the next President of the United States.

The announcement of the Committee's decision brought a personal message to each man and to every family of the community. Every male citizen was assigned some place, if not as an actor, singer, or member of the orchestra, as a shifter of scenes, usher, or

fireman of the village for it is always an honour to be allowed to take part in any capacity. To every boy and girl was given a place either in groups on the stage or in the tableaux. Each performer was required to sign a contract which, among many other requirements, exacted implicit obedience to the Director of the Play and to the Committee, and the greatest care concerning conduct. To help him in this latter requirement no amusements, no gaieties are permitted from the beginning of the Passion year.

The happiness and the heart-aches of these players cannot be described. Years, a whole life time, do these people patiently wait for the roles they have dreamed of playing. Of course every boy hopes sometime to be the Christus; since only one can have the role, we can easily realize the great number who must be disappointed. Perhaps a greater disappointment than this is the failure to receive a part once played. Since no "make ups" are used, and since years "pile up" it is only natural that the actors become too old for parts befitting them in their younger years. Since the committee must look to the whole and not to the individual great sorrow and suffering ensue.

We shall now notice a few of the chief actors. At their head is the choragus, the smith, Jacob Rutz. He, indeed, deserves to rank among the veterans of the Play for this year it is the seventh time that he ap-

pears among the actors. In 1850 he sat as a curly fair-haired boy in the lap of Mother Eve, in 1860 he sang in the chorus as tenor, in 1870 as bass, in 1880 he was choragus and now again in 1910 the fourth time. At the age of sixty-three he still arouses the admiration of the spectators by his voice and noble bearing. He lives entirely wrapped up in his role and it is almost certain that he would die, as have some of the others, if it were taken from him.

Anton Lang, twice the Christus, is thirty-five years old. He bears regular features, sharply cut, surrounded by a fair beard parted in the middle; a pair of blue eyes with a marked expression of innocence, almost childlike. He is the Christus such as our greatest artists have imagined Christ; as Raphael, Overbeck, and Steinle have created him. His blameless life and high ideals have weighed more in his favour in causing him to be chosen than his pronounced talent for the theater.

This year Ottilie Zwink fills for the first time the role of Mary. She is thirty years of age. Her pleasing regular features, full of deep expression, are admirably suitable for the Mater Dolorosa. In 1900 she sang alto in the chorus.

Her father, Johannes Zwink, a painter, in 1870 and 1880 took the part of John, in 1890, 1900, 1910, the part of Judas. Of all the actors he has decidedly the most interesting

manner and acts splendidly. He shows in every detail the temptation and the tragedy of his part. He represents in a very realistic way the remorse of Judas and so actually identified himself with the part that on one occasion he actually hanged himself and had to be rescued. In the play, of course, the curtain drops before this final act is performed.

A charming personality of earnest expression is Marie Mayr in the role of Mary Magdalene. Her love for the Master is brought out in a very real and simple manner. In 1900 she took the part of the Angel in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Richard Lang as Lazarus seems to me to be the second best actor of the cast. His sympathy at the home in Bethany was excellently portrayed.

Other well-known figures of this year are Alfred Bierling, a young, curly, fair-haired boy of eighteen who takes the part of John; Andreas Lang, the Peter of 1910, the Rabbi of 1900; Peter Rendl who acts the part of Joseph of Arimathea; Bürgermeister Bauer who appeared in 1900 as Pilate and again this year, who brings out to perfection the powerful personality of the high-spirited Roman. The characteristic manner in which he communicates to the crowd surrounding the high priests his true opinion of their attitude makes a marked impression upon the spectators; his daughter, Victoria Bauer,

appears as Martha; Wilhelm Lang acts the part of Nicodemus; George Breitsamter plays Caiaphas, the Nathaniel of 1900, whose two brothers appear as Nathaniel and a member of the High Council; Sebastian Lang appears as Annas; Wilhelm Rutz the last time Nicodemus, this time the Rabbi; Hans Mayr as Herod; Anton Lechner appears as Prologuist.

As the intention of the people in great part is to edify and fulfil the vow of their ancestors they precede their play by a service in the church. We follow the stream of people where we find five priests reading mass. We see many of the actors, especially the Christus and the Judas, side by side in the balcony, where they go to fortify themselves with prayer for the work of the day. From there we hasten to the theater where a devout stillness surrounds the place, broken only by the noisy arrival of one of Cook's men trying to seat some belated spectators. Away over the gable of the theater we see the peaks of the mountains, and the sunshine of the glorious summer morning floods the by-ways of Jerusalem; over all the pure, blue sky. Behind the curtain the actors grouped around their director or priest are repeating the prayer, "Our Father."

The music begins—muffled and harmonious from the half-hidden orchestra. From the columned halls on either side of the stage, the chorus slowly, solemnly, and ma-



jestically comes forth in two processions across the proscenium, taking up its position in one long row. The Prologuist then begins his recitative:

“Bow down now in deep adoring love  
Oh race by the curse of God oppressed,  
Peace He sends from the Heavens above.  
He is not wroth for ever  
Though just his anger, for the offense was  
great.  
‘I do not desire,’ saith He,  
‘The death of any sinner—I forgive  
Him freely, let him live.’  
For this He offered up His Son the world to  
save.  
Praise and thanks for this we give  
O! Eternal.”

The first tableau is then shown: “The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.” Adam and Eve dressed in white skins are driven out of Paradise. Adam hides his face with his hands, but Eve casts a longing glance back to Paradise, and with her sorrowing mankind looks back once more upon the lost Paradise of religious peace and childlike innocence. The chorus singing of humanity banished from Eden’s joys accompanies this tableau with most touching and appropriate music. And now the Prologuist begins—he recites the fine introductory verses in the same antique meter in

which Daisenberger had written the introduction for the chorus.

“Welcome to all united by the Saviour’s  
love  
Who here assemble and in sorrow follow  
Him  
On that long mournful journey  
Which at last leads to the tomb.  
And all who thus today have come from near  
and far  
Must feel themselves united in fraternal  
love  
As disciples of the Lord  
Who for all has suffered death.  
He who in so great compassion gave His life  
for us  
And died a bitter death: To Him with praise  
we turn,  
With gratitude and love,  
Our hearts and eyes unto.  
To Him we lift our thoughts, to Him our  
souls we give.  
Pray with us now, pray, for again the hour  
has come  
Wherein we pay the sacred debt  
We vowed long since to yield our God.”

This is followed by a tableau, “The Adoration of the Cross,” representative of the remedy for humanity’s evil. Then the text with its iambs begins.

“Behind the scenes are now heard the

loud cries of Hosanna, and mingling with the song of the chorus are heard the voices of the jubilant crowd bringing Hosannas to their Lord and Saviour. The spectator is strongly impressed; he had scarcely expected to find there a mass of five hundred people, such good taste in the colour and arrangement of the costumes, together with this flow of pulsating life in every movement and action. The first impression is overpowering and we put the question to ourselves: Does all this originate from heaven, is it born of earth, is it art, is it nature, or is it both? We have scarcely grasped all this when we are suddenly placed under the spell of the most wonderful of all—now He Himself appears. He steps forth before us a living form."

When we witness the strewing of palms upon which the Son of Man treads, his slender form in the traditional red and grey garments standing out in all its purity—when we see the face with the expression of infinite tenderness and submission we almost realize that He is standing before us in the flesh.

In the meantime the Christus has alighted from the ass and has entered the portico of the temple. He sees the consecrated spot which the traders have turned into a market place. In holy anger He raises His hand, overturns the tables of the money-changers, opens the cages of the doves, and brandishes

the scourge over the heads of the profaners of the temple. The Pharisees become enraged, the traders conspire together for revenge, the animal nature in man now associates itself with the threatening power of the priestly throngs. All conspire together to destroy Him.

The foundation is now laid upon which the chief priests, the scribes and the elders can erect their pernicious superstructure. In the next act begins the conspiracy of the High Council.

We may call this assembly of the High Council a masterpiece, so powerfully do those assembled work upon us. The clever reasoning of the chief High Priest, the religious fanaticism, the priestly hierarchy in danger of being overthrown, the passion of the Jewish character which is expressed in the words: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"—all this presents a picture of thoughtful consideration and of masterly portrayal of character.

The leave-taking of Bethany follows, and the whole shadow of coming painful events, as described in the Gospel of St. John, seems to cast itself over our hearts.

Here for the first time the women appear. Mary Magdalene anoints the feet of the Lord and dries them with her long light hair. Judas, clad in a costume of yellow and reddish brown and with a countenance of the same unhappy color, is enraged at the waste,

and we feel that avarice has already entered his heart. Then we witness the sorrowful leave-taking of the Saviour and His disciples, we see the last leave-taking from the *Mother* whom he thanks for all the loving care which she has shown to Him in the thirty-three years of His life. His pronunciation of the word *Mother* here impressed me as being the sweetest and most pathetic word I had ever heard. This scene is one of the most beautiful and touching of all. There is nothing more impressive than the sight of Him, appointed to die, who, with full knowledge of His fate, does not falter. All the Christus' sorrowful preparations in which He explains to His disciples the necessity of His sufferings, the quiet scene of the washing of the feet, the impressiveness of the Last Supper; all these carry the soul through a sea of approaching sorrow to the Mount of Olives, where the presentiment becomes certainty. The impression produced by the Last Supper, which is the facsimile of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," is indescribable.

Now comes the preparation for the Mount of Olives. As the beautiful tableaux, the "Manna in the Wilderness" and the "Grapes brought by the spies from Canaan," represented by four hundred people, introduce the Last Supper, so the sufferings on the Mount of Olives and the taking of Jesus prisoner are prefaced by two explanatory

pictures: "Adam tilling the soil in the sweat of his brow" is a precursor of the agony of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and the "Assassination of Amasa by Joab near the rock of Gibeon" foreshadows the taking of Jesus prisoner. The music here is exceptionally good and prepares our hearts and minds for Judas' treachery. The simple, melodious passages are suggestive of Mozart and Handel.

Then the scene on the Mount of Olives—the beautiful profile of the pale, sorrow-stricken countenance stands out from the back-ground—and the Angel approaches Him in His despair: strengthened through the aid of the Father, the Son of Man, drenched in the cold sweat of agony, goes forth to expiate the sins of the world.

Then come the cruel trials before Annas and Caiaphas, the rough treatment by the soldiers, and the torments of martyrdom. "The way in which the actors perform all this, with what nicety of perception—how all the scenes, however boisterous, are still kept within the bounds of good taste—to realize all this we must have witnessed it. Amidst all this again come the affecting scenes of the faithless disciples, the repentance of Peter, the terrible ending of Judas."

Now they drag Him, the Man without sin, to Pilate, that he may pronounce upon Him the sentence of death. The noble Roman understands the evil designs of the Jewish

High Council, like sledge-hammer blows his powerful arguments fall upon the heads of the High Priests, and it really rejoices one when he tells them the truth.

But he is too weak to set the Saviour free; he sends Him to Herod that the latter may condemn Him. But this worldly sensualist, who had John the Baptist executed in cold blood, and who is seeking an interpreter of his dreams, says He is guilty of no evil. He sends Him back again to Pilate, but the latter again refuses to pass the sentence of death and asks to hear the general voice of the people. In the meantime he orders the Christus to be scourged.

The Christus is bound to a pillar, scourged, and when covered with blood, crowned with the crown of thorns. "The manner in which this scene is enacted, how the soldier who puts the crown of thorns on Him first of all puts on the iron glove in order not to hurt himself, and the way in which the men press the crown, with crossed rods, down on the noble head—it is all so cruelly yet quietly carried out that it cuts into our very souls without at the same time offending our aesthetic feelings."

Pilate wishes to hear the voice of the people. The mob stirred up by the priests and traders at the order of Caiaphas fills the air with its shouts: "Death to the Nazarene, Death to the Galilean, He must die, His blood be upon us and upon our children"

—the same people who before had shouted Hosannas to the Son of David. Once again Pilate endeavors to save the Christus by releasing Him instead of Barabbas. The depraved rabble shouts for the blood of Jesus. Then he takes water, washes his hands, breaks his staff; reluctantly the words proceed from his lips: "Take ye Him and crucify Him." And here there occurs a singular coincidence. A broad ray of sunlight pierces the clouds which have been gathering for some time, and falls directly upon the head of the Christus as He stands there, bound with the cords of a felon. This accident of nature produces a wonderful effect and impression upon the spectators.

Now come two wonderful tableaux: the first represents Isaac carrying up the slope of Mount Moriah the wood with which he was to be burned; the second, another scene from the wilderness, full of spirit and life, shows Moses raising the brazen serpent on high so that all who look upon it may live even though they may have been bitten by the fiery serpents.

Again the curtain rises and we see the group of the holy women anxiously seeking the Lord and utterly unaware as yet of the fate which is to befall Him. This meeting of Mary the Mother, Mary Magdalene, Veronica, John, and Joseph of Arimathea with the Christus dragging the cross to Golgotha is entirely too pathetic for words. Her words:



"O God! It is my Son! My Jesus!" were positively heart rending. Here Veronica hands Him the linen cloth. They follow the procession to the place of execution.

The scene changes, Jesus now being in Golgotha. The chorus appears singing the funeral dirge. It has completed its song of lamentation. Hammering is heard behind the curtain, which is now raised showing the thieves on the crosses, their arms bound to the cross beam, their feet only nailed, while upon the prostrate cross between is stretched the body of Jesus. "Raise the cross! Lay hold!" commands the centurion. A final nail fastening the inscription above the head is driven and then the gigantic cross with its burden is slowly elevated. It grows dark, there is the mockery, the prayer "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," the thirst, the cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" then at last "It is finished! Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Then the roaring of thunder is heard and the centurion pierces His heart with a spear, while the women weep at the foot of the cross.

And now compassionate love approaches. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come with ladders and tools to take the Body down. They climb up and bind the dead Body with long strips of white linen, the ends of which they throw over the cross as in Ruben's "Descent from the Cross" in

Antwerp. The friends standing around take hold of them, acting as a resisting force in order to let the Body down gently. Joseph and Nicodemus begin to draw the nails out of the flesh with pincers. Mary is sitting on a stone, and with folded hands resignedly awaits her son. "Noble men, bring me soon the Body of my child," she gently implores. The women spread a linen cloth before her feet to receive Him. Joseph carries the Body. Partly carried, partly suspended by the linen, the lifeless Form is let down from the pillar of torture. Then the Body is borne away to be laid in the new tomb of Joseph.

The funeral chorus is sung, the watchmen are left on guard before the sepulchre, there is the earthquake, the Saviour appears.

But the shadows of evening are fast falling, the sun's rays shine slantingly over the stage, wet with the rain of the last half hour. Slowly the curtain falls on the scene of the Ascension, amidst the strains of the Hallelujah chorus, the final words of which are:

*"Hallelujah!*

*Praise, Honour, Worship, Power and Glory,  
Be to Thee from Everlasting  
to Everlasting."*









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